

The Professor Who Fell Out the Window

Alumni remember their favorite professors

Sunday, December 21, 2008

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Whether they told you to "shape up or drop out," stayed up all night helping you prepare for a test, or just made you laugh with their quintessentially professorial quirks, there are certain professors you'll never forget. That's what we heard you say, over and over again, when we asked for stories of memorable UNH professors. So many reminiscences came in that we've created a web page at www.alumni.unh.edu/professors to post them all. Read on for some examples in the following pages. We hope you enjoy these stories as much as we did.

Bake Off!

Frances Platts '33, Home Economics



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I started at UNH in 1949, but because I enlisted for the Korean War, I didn't get back to campus until 1953. I was in the hotel school, and one of the requirements was to take two home economics classes. The first one was Home Ec 15, and it was a horrible class. We had to bake cookies and brownies, that type of thing. I had just come back from the war, where I was on the front lines with a field artillery observation battalion. I had four battle stars and a Purple Heart. I couldn't take that class cold turkey--I had to be fortified. So I'd go down to the American Legion post in Newmarket beforehand. Miss Frances Platts taught the class. Once when I walked into her class well fortified, she said, "John, what is that smell?" I told her, "That's cleaning fluid on my shirt." She bought it--she was a sheltered lady. The real reason she is my favorite professor is that there were all these girls in the class. One of them, Frances Legallee '56, and I started getting friendly. She was a big help in getting my lab report done, I'll tell you. And 53 years later, we're still baking cookies together.

—Jack Barnes '56

Don't Shoot the Messenger

Hermon L. Slobin, Mathematics

Hermon L. Slobin taught mathematics at UNH from 1919 until his retirement in 1948. Born in the Russian village of Smolian in 1883, he was 12 years old when he emigrated to America. Dr. Slobin was well known for his sense of humor. "Flunk is an intransitive verb," he told his classes. "I don't flunk you, I merely record your flunk!"

—From the UNH Archives

Mission Impossible

William Mosberg, Mechanical Engineering

I remember Professor Mosberg standing in front of our thermodynamics class, explaining his policy on tests. He said, "The tests will be open book, open note . . . bring anything you want--it won't help." I would not have laughed that day if I had realized that he was serious.

—Matthew Camillieri '92

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—*Jack Barnes '56*

And Don't Trip Over My Wellies on Your Way Out

Max Maynard, English

One of my first professors at UNH when I arrived in January 1965 as a young graduate student in English was the popular iconoclast Max Maynard, well known for his humanities classes' forays into Boston for cultural events and pub crawls, and for his still-thick British accent, which I suspect he perpetuated and embellished somewhat for effect. I was quite confident of my abilities in his class, having worked previously as a trade publication writer and editor. I thought I was doing well in Max's survey class on 18th-century English literature until he returned my first essay, graded C+. Of course I requested a meeting. He sat back in his chair, hands clasped atop his white-haired head as I made my case. "I can't believe this is worth only a C+," I said, throwing my best ammunition at him. "I was a professional magazine writer in New York before I came to UNH." Without missing a beat or removing his hands from the top of his head, he replied, "Well, sir, it must have been a lousy magazine."

—*David Hubler '65G*

Animal Liberation

William Yale '28, History



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William Yale, an authority on the Middle East who taught at UNH from 1928 to 1957, once had a small dog that frequently accompanied him to class. The dog was well behaved, sitting quietly and attentively in the front of the room during the professor's lectures. One day, however, as Yale lectured to his summer-school class on European and world history, the dog sat back, yawned quite audibly, got up and left the room. This was too much for the professor. Slamming his books together, he said, "If it's too dry for my little dog, it's too dry for you! Class dismissed!"

—From the UNH Archives

Out of Pocket Expenses

Nobel K. Peterson, Natural Resources

At one point during my first semester I was questioning the value of staying in school. My draft number was low and even though the war was winding down, there was still a possibility my number would be called. I first met Nobel Peterson in his Soils 501 class. I was in lab one day when Doc Peterson struck up a conversation. I told him I was going to quit and figure out what to do with my life. I explained school was expensive and I couldn't rationalize staying. Two weeks later, he asked me if I'd like to work in the lab cleaning test tubes and doing other general work. I said I'd give it a try. A few weeks later, he hired me to work a couple extra hours around the apartment house where he and his wife, Doris, lived on Woodman Road. Then he asked if I knew anything about audiovisual equipment and if I could help him prep materials for lectures. Eventually, Jim Booth '74 and I were helping him orchestrate his lectures. (At one point, for his first lecture of the year, we made him appear in a cloud of smoke.) He kept me working for three years, including summer jobs doing field research. I found out only after he passed away that all that time he had paid my salary out of his own pocket. I stayed in

school because of him. I think he saved my life.
—Jeff Groman '74

Down with Busy Bodies

Elizabeth Crepeau '66, '88G, Occupational Therapy

In the early '70s, as a brand spanking new and rather difficult OT student (that is to say, not really used to listening to others, but rather doing things my own way), I loved learning from Elizabeth Crepeau, professor of occupational therapy. One example was her lecture on what it meant to be educated: it wasn't so much about knowing things, but knowing how to learn. I have also often recalled her admonition to let little old ladies staring out the window do just that if that was their occupation of choice; with patients, students, even my own parents, I try to resist the urge to make OT be about being busy and let it just be about living as one wishes.

—Laurel Cargill Radley '78

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—From the UNH Archives

A Differential Operator

Shepley L. Ross, Mathematics

I took several courses from Professor Shepley Ross, including his introduction to differential equations, and later nonlinear differential equations and non-Euclidean geometry. Dr. Ross was a fine professor and I enjoyed all three courses. However, I especially remember the day in his differential equations course when he stood up on a chair in front of the class and gave the Differential Equations Cheer:

e to the x, dx, e to the x, dx
Wronskian, Wronskian
RAH! RAH! RAH!

Some things are not meant to be forgotten!
—Douglas Vaughan '68

Every College Graduate's Nightmare

Robert Lambert, Physics



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A physics major, I took an esoteric math-for-math's-sake course. After a few classes, I lost interest and stopped going, but I didn't drop the course and I even took the midterm, which I flunked. Before I knew it, final exams were upon me. The night before the final, I confessed to my most trusted physics professor, Bob Lambert, that I was flunking a math course, with the final exam the next morning. He said, "We can't have a physics major flunk a math department course. Get your book and meet me in my lab downstairs." He walked me through the entire course that night, chapter by chapter, having me solve the math problems on the blackboard. Soon it was morning and we were both exhausted. I ended up acing the final, and, as I remember, got a B for the course--thanks to Bob Lambert.

—Samuel McKay '66, '72G

Drop Anchor or Jump Ship

Mathias Richards, Dean of Agriculture

After a very good freshman year academically, in my second year I seemed to find more nonacademic diversions. In short, I wasn't doing very hot academically. I wanted to change majors, so I was transferred to Dean Mathias Richards. After agreeing that on my current course I was probably wasting my savings and education, he suggested I drop out for a couple of years and figure out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. He assured me that I would have no problem getting back into UNH. I took his advice, dropped out and joined the Peace Corps. I wrote him from Colombia to tell him what I had done and received a very warm letter wishing me well. In the end, I did come back to UNH. Recently, I had a conversation with a classmate about people who had affected our lives in important ways. Mathias Richards will always be the one I most wish I could turn back the clock and say how much I appreciated his willingness and interest to point me in the right direction.

—*Tad Runge Jr. '67*

Alle alle Oops

Arthur C. Borrer, Zoology

Arthur C. Borrer taught ornithology, the study of birds. When the class gathered for field trips, my friend and I would casually drift towards Dr. Borrer's car so we could jump in before anyone else. One stormy winter day, we went out in search of ocean birds seeking shelter close to land. As we drove along the shore, Dr. Borrer suddenly spotted something on the beach. He screeched to a halt at the side of the road and grabbed his binoculars, saying, "Is that a dovekie or a beer can?" After one glance, he announced, "Clam shell. Close, Borrer! You had it in the right kingdom!" With that he pulled back out onto the road and sped off, leaving the students in the cars behind us searching the beach with their binoculars and trying to figure out what rare bird we had seen.

—*Roberta Humphrey Manter '75*

From Soup to Nuts

Samuel Smith, Animal and Nutritional Sciences

In Nutrition 101, we spent a semester learning from Sam Smith the complicated chemistry of food, especially the kinds we should eat to be healthy. At our last class, a brave student asked him what he ate to stay healthy. His answer was simple. "I eat peanut butter sandwiches on whole wheat bread with a glass of milk."

—*Carrie Keating Griffiths '87*

Fuzzy Math

Catherine Craycraft Plante, Accounting and Finance

Professor Cathy Craycraft asked different members of our class what they wanted to be when we "grew up." I told her that I wanted to be an accountant. She told me to never say that. She told us all to answer, "a CPA." Certified public accountants, she said, get to do all the cool stuff. The next day she told us a joke in class to illustrate her point. It went like this. Three people showed up for an interview for an accounting position. The interviewer asked, "What is two plus two?" The first one said, "Four." The interviewer said, "We will let you know." The next guy walked in. He was asked the same question. He replied, "Five." He got the same reply. The third guy walked in. He was asked the same question. He replied, "What do you want it to be?" He was hired on the spot.

—Rob Hylen '92

Seeing Red

Gwynne Harris Daggett, English



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During my years at UNH, the country was still bogged down in a Cold War mentality. "Reds" were supposedly everywhere, especially in academia. One small, seemingly innocent action by Professor Gwynne Harris Daggett brought down the wrath of William Loeb, head of the Manchester Union Leader, and prompted the New Hampshire Legislature to consider cutting funding to the university. Professor Daggett had smuggled a banned book, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D. H. Lawrence, into the United States from Europe. He offered to loan it to students, emphasizing the brilliance of Lawrence's mind rather than the racy writing for which it was outlawed. Rumors started to fly. Surely the professor must be a communist to offer his students such radical reading. Besides, he exhibited proletarian leanings, riding a bike to class even on snowy days. Wiser heads soon prevailed. Daggett kept his job, and funding to the university

remained secure.

—Nancy Bere Janus '59

(FF minus minus)

E. Howard Stolworthy, Mechanical Engineering

While some professors could intimidate students, Professor E. Howard Stolworthy was the only one I ever had who could on occasion actually terrify them. He had the watery, blue, unblinking eyes and deadpan look of a Western gunslinger, plus a quick temper and dry sense of humor. He had contributed to a textbook on thermodynamics by Lester Lichty, and he had memorized most of the book. For another Stolworthy class, Internal Combustion Engines, I had collected as many of the I.C.E. lab files as I could from upperclassmen. They made great reference material as they also included the professor's grade and comments on the back. One was beautifully typed with a great analysis. When I turned it over, it had the following grade: (FF minus minus) ! When I inquired around about the individual who submitted it, I was told that he had transferred to another college. The translation of that lab grade was: 1) You flunked this lab. 2) You flunked this course. 3) You will never pass this course as long as I teach it, and since this is a graduation prerequisite, you will never graduate in mechanical engineering at UNH. I immediately put it aside, and many hours later when I had completed my write-up, I looked at it again and discovered that the writer had plagiarized whole sections of the Lichty book.

—Joseph L. Reed '55

Abandon 'Hopefully' All Ye Who Enter Here

John A. Beckett, Management

As a business administration major, I was required to take a senior seminar with Professor John Beckett. In the spring of 1977, I needed a reference for my first job, so I mustered my courage and made an appointment. We sat in his office while he questioned me about this particular career opportunity and my future plans. Following our discussion, he wrote a single word on a small piece of paper, handed it to me, and suggested I try to refrain from using the word so often. After what seemed to be an interminable pause he took my reference form, wrote "Highly Recommended" across the face of it and signed his name. Once out of his office, I looked at the piece of paper. He had written the word "hopefully." That piece of paper has remained on my bulletin board for more than 20 years as a reminder that it is more effective to work for something than to hope for it.

—Jonathan Kipp '77

Idiot Box

Alden Winn '37, Electrical Engineering

In the 1960s, the electrical engineering introductory course was taught by the then-department chair, Professor Alden Winn. We sophomores were a little in awe at being taught by such an exalted person. In an early class, preparing us for an upcoming lab where we'd be working with some large machinery, Professor Winn described a specific piece of equipment that had a protection circuit to prevent damage to the equipment and to us. The system, he said, was "foolproof." One of the students asked, "What if you hold the switch closed by hanging on to the handle and keeping it in contact?" Professor Winn paused, shook his head and replied, "Well, I said it was foolproof. I never said it was damn-foolproof."

—*Dick Ross '66*

The Gift of Gab

Thomas Williams '50, '58G, English

News that Tom Williams had been nominated for a prestigious award for his latest novel arrived at Hamilton Smith Hall the very morning I had a conference scheduled with him to discuss a story I had written. Faculty members kept dropping by to offer congratulations. Finally, he shut his door and apologized for all the interruptions. He began to talk about my main character's use of voice--he had obviously read and reread my story, making detailed notes on everything from plot to punctuation. Here was a man who had just been nominated for a National Book Award, talking to me about whether my main character's dialogue was believable. He was completely focused on my world at the very time he should have been on the top of his own. A postscript: That short story was eventually published in 2004, 18 years later.

—*Jon Steiner '86, '89G*

Yes, Twenty-Three?

Jiann-Jer Chen '68G, '73G, Applied Science, Thompson School



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All freshmen in the Thompson School's forestry program were required to take algebra and trigonometry to better prepare us for surveying. Our professor was Dr. Jiann-Jer Chen, who knew the subject matter inside and out. His heavy Korean accent forced me to listen very carefully--if I let my attention lapse for a minute or two, I was lost. At the end of the semester, we said good-bye and he thanked us for working hard. He explained how much he had enjoyed teaching us and expressed his hope that we'd stop by and visit him. "Please don't expect me to remember your names. For one thing there's just so many of you, but the biggest reason is that you people all look the same." After almost 30 years, it still makes me smile.

—Jim M. O'Malley '80

Le Hockey? Un Sport de Femmes? Ridicule!

Louis Hudon, French

In 1974, we had put together a women's club ice hockey team, borrowing equipment from the men's team. We had practice at 6 a.m. Every day at 8 a.m., I had a French literature class with Louis Hudon. He was a diminutive, chain-smoking Canadian and I found him captivating. As there was no time to change between practice and class, I routinely showed up in sweats and my hockey jersey. He found the idea of women playing hockey quite ridiculous, but something must have piqued his interest, because one day around 7 a.m., I looked behind the goal and saw a swirl of smoke rising. Monsieur Hudon, with his black-framed glasses and beret, was watching us intently. Finally, he smiled.

—Laura Gieg Kell '77

Bee Therapy

J.R. Hepler, Horticulture

My roommates and I made the mistake of not studying the way we should have. We were seeking some easy "snap" course that could guarantee an A. One of us found a course called Bee Keeping. In the first lab, the professor, J.R. Hepler, led us out to the apiary and had us all stand close. He took off the cover of a beehive and with his bare hands gently scooped off a bunch of bees. He said to the first student, "Here, hold out your hands--you take them." We all started to laugh at this poor sap, who was really scared. The professor knew several of us were there seeking an easy A, so as this first guy was pulling back, he followed it up with, "Do you want to pass this course?" With that, the guy held out his hands and received the bunch of bees as we laughed even louder. But our laughter was short-lived. The professor added, "Each of you now hold out your hands and pass the bees along--and anyone who does not take the bees will fail this course." Needless to say, the bees were passed along!

—Will Payson '53

Fall Guy

Donald Perkins, Mathematics

Donald Perkins was short and always wore the same suit, summer or winter. One day in class he was sitting on the window sill and the window was open. He fell out the window, which fortunately was on the first floor, and when he came back in the classroom he was still lecturing.

—Allen Thornton '49

Capital Appreciation

Ruth Woodruff, Economics



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I took an elective course in economics with Professor Ruth Woodruff. I thought the course would be about corporations and business, but some of the things she taught us were the demand for steel and aluminum, and the wage level differences between union and nonunion workers. My dad worked in a steel mill, and I had worked at the mill for a year before enrolling at UNH. I told her how we worked rotating swing shifts, which she said was a prime example of the full employment of capital. She learned that my wife and baby and I were living at Forest Park, and she invited us to her home for tea. I switched my major to economics, and made Phi Beta Kappa. At the Phi Beta Kappa dinner, my mom, a factory worker from Providence, R.I., was frightened to death, but Professor Woodruff sat next to her. I am not sure what they talked about, but just the other day, my mom, now 90 years old, asked, "Do you remember Professor Woodruff?" My answer: "How could I forget?"

—*Joseph Hight '65*

Derailleured

Hans Heilbronner, History

I had Professor Hans Heilbronner for freshman history. I was pretty much scared to death of this austere, brilliant man. The class met at 8 a.m.; Professor Heilbronner was more than prompt and expected the same from his students. One morning it got to be 8:10 a.m. and no Professor Heilbronner. There was uncertainty about what to do. As 8:20 a.m. approached, the door opened and in came the professor, books and papers under his arm, ugly bloody scrape on his forehead, looking all over disheveled as he walked toward the lectern with a slight limp. There wasn't a sound or breath in the room--all eyes were upon him. "I fell off my bike," he said, smiling sheepishly. Everyone burst into laughter. Class was canceled.

—*Sharon Hilton Tinkham '68*

It is the East and Mrs. Hapgood is the Sun

Robert Hapgood, English

I was fortunate enough to take two classes with Professor Robert Hapgood. One of them was a course on Shakespeare, his area of expertise. We were reading "Romeo and Juliet," and I--in my not-so-infinite wisdom--commented that this was not a story of true love but of mere physical attraction. Romeo did not fall in love with Juliet; he simply saw her across a crowded room and thought she looked good. Professor Hapgood, with his usual sparkle in his eye, gently said that I might have a point. But, he added, "The first time I saw the future Mrs. Hapgood some 40 years ago, I knew she was the one."

—*Michele Tracey Martin '91*



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